

## Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, September 10, 1900

Mr s. A. G. Bell 9 rue Boccador, Paris, France Truro, N. S., Sept. 10, 1900. My dear little wife —

Hurrah! Miss Safford has suddenly appeared when I had given her entirely up, and so I may be able to send you some account of myself.

I reached Baddeck last Saturday morning the 8th inst. but nothing had been heard from Miss Safford, and she did not arrive by the evening's train, so I made up my mind that I had lost her. However it was just as well, for I was tired out with travelling, not having been in a bed for twelve days, and it did feel so nice to be once more in a bed where I could stretch at all angles — instead of being confined in a coffin in which I could not move — that I made Sunday truly a day of rest. I found Maggie and Mary in charge of the house, Mr. McCurdy came over and stayed with me, Lena came over on Sunday and took lunch, and the boys appeared in the evening. I should say — some of the boys — for George was not there, being absent in New Glasgow. Mr. and Mrs. Kennan met my steamer about the point of Washabach in their naphtha launch, and they looked very fine shooting past us with the American flag flying at the stern. I noticed that the boat was half full of flowers, and that after passing the Blue Hill, the launch made straight tracks for the 2 point, so that I was not surprised upon my arrival at B. B. Hall to find flowers everywhere, and Mrs. Kennan and Susie — the brightest flowers of all — waiting to welcome me.

Douglass and Lucian have not been very well for some time past, they have shot up wonderfully, but look somewhat thin, they have been suffering from something that seems to have been epidemic in Baddeck.

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Poor old Mr. McNeil — from whom we bought the McNeil Spring property that supplies the Laboratory — died yesterday morning. Angus Buchannan has been quite ill, and Doctors advise him to try a change of climate. He has almost lost his voice. The affection seems to be confined at present to the larynx, with a tendency to spread down the bronchial tubes — but the lungs do not seem to be affected. People here seem to think him in a serious condition, but after talking with him about himself I am inclined to think it is only a local affection that need not affect his general health. He feels well, and looks robust, which I am sure could not be if he had tuberculosis or cancer. One of the first signs of trouble in these diseases is — emaciation, and he shows no indication of that. It is probable that he may leave Beinn Bhreagh in two or three weeks to try a change of climate.

Mr. McInnis seems very well. Lena and Augusta are in Baddeck, but I have not seen Augusta. Lena spent the afternoon 3 (Sunday) at B. B. and had great delight in worming out of me all about Bert, under strict promise that she should not tell anybody anything about it — excepting her most intimate friends!

John McKillop spent the evening with me and remained till late at night so as to get full instructions as to his work on the mountain.

Mr. McCurdy looks better than I have seen him. He has lost that soft, puffed out condition of face that he had in Washington and seems once more to be in good muscular condition. His muscles are like sinews, and altogether he seems better and stronger, and feels better than he has ever done before. Ebedec matters look promising, and Mr. McCurdy has just made a new invention concerning the film that seems to be of such importance that he is starting right off for New York to put it into practice within the limits of the United States. hitherto a sheet of celluloid has been employed as a backing for a sensitive film — a substitute for a sheet of glass so that in the ordinary arrangement we have two films with some sort of sticky material to glue them together. Now, celluloid is substantially the same material as collodion which in the old wet process was poured upon a glass plate and sensitized with silver, &c. Mr. McCurdy's new plan is to sensitize a celluloid film

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directly in the process of making, by admixture mixing with the fluid material (which by evaporation forms the film) the silver solution. This seems to me a brilliant idea, and it seems wonderful that it does not seem to have been thought of before.

Instead of a celluloid film supporting a sensitive film (of gelatine or other material) he proposed to sensitize the celluloid film itself, and the plan will surely work. We know that collodion can be sensitized, but it is doubtful whether a collodion film is strong enough to stand by itself: Celluloid is strong enough to stand by itself, but it is doubtful whether it can be easily sensitized.

The two substances are formed from the same materials — and but probably in different proportions. It is obvious therefore that if celluloid cannot easily be sensitized a mixture of the component materials in proportions between those forming collodion and celluloid should give us a substance possessing intermediate properties — strong enough to stand alone, and capable of sensitization. Mr. McCurdy is now on his way to New York to make experiments upon the manufacture of sensitive celluloid films. Please consider all this as confidential. I write it in order that the idea, as it has been communicated to me, may be preserved in black and white with a date attached (September 10, 1900) for future eventualities. If McCurdy's experiments should succeed, a revolution in the manufacture of photographic material will be brought about, lawsuits will take place, interferences will be declared — and Mr. McCurdy will be called upon to prove the date of his conception, and the date of reduction to practice. I do not know the date of conception, but, upon my arrival in Baddeck I found him full of the idea, and he has explained it to me very fully this morning (September 10, 1900).

Your tenant at Crescent Grove has left for the states, suffering from incipient tuberculosis, or something of that kind. He required the assistance of an attendant or nurse on the train to Boston, and so employed George McKeen. He is going to try change of climate in Colorado, or elsewhere, and Mr. McCurdy thinks it not unlikely that George McKeen will go with him.

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The only member of the McKeen family left in Baddeck is Winnie. Her Aunt is staying with her temporarily until Mrs. McKeen returns. Mrs. McKeen has gone to stay for a time with Mrs. Norwood (Ethel McKeen), and Maud has gone there too — I presume in the capacity of nurse.

Mrs. Gwillam and the reading room are flourishing, I believe. Miss Archibald has been quite ill and is now in very feeble health. Mrs. Henry Blanchard, of Windsor (Arthur McCurdy's sister) has had a stroke of paralysis, but is now recovering. One of Mr. Henry Blanchard's sons, brother of Percy Blanchard, went out to the Transvaal with the first Canadian Contingent, and news has been received of his death. He was shot in three or four places, but seemed to be doing well in the hospital when blood poisoning carried him off. Mr. Atwater is expected to return soon, unharmed, after having seen service in no less than 637 engagements.

But, enough of Baddeck. I telegraphed yesterday morning, Sunday, to your mother and to Charlie letting them know I was on this side of the Atlantic, and would meet them in New York on Wednesday morning, and I have since had a reply from Charlie. I also telegraphed Bert, giving him my congratulations, and best wishes for his future, and telling him that I was going right down to Washington to see what I could do for my boy. I found a very nice letter from Prof. Grosvenor, waiting for me in Baddeck, which I enclose. Have telegraphed him that I would call at Amherst on my return from Washington, and that I would be pleased to see him on my way down if he could look in at the Parker house tomorrow night about ten o'clock. I telegraphed Mr. Booth to meet me at the Gilsey House, New York, on Wednesday at noon, and I telegraphed my father asking him whether he and Mrs. Bell would not return with me to Baddeck for a month.

I received your cablegram at St. Johns, Newfoundland and another in Baddeck from Tours, saying that you were going to Brittany "WITH MCCURDY"! Who in all the world is McCurdy? Your Uncle Richard and Robert are surely not in France, and Arthur W. is here.

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I presume that Dr. Day took you to Tours in an automobile, and perhaps you have met your cousin Evylyn's protege "McCurdy", and he may perhaps be your escort to Brittany.

I have telegraphed to Mrs. Pratt for the latest news of Braidwood. I understand she has been making important discoveries —

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I left Beinn Bhreagh this morning with Mr. McCurdy, who came on as far as New Glasgow to attend a political meeting, which was to be addressed by the Hon. Mr. Fielding, and by the Hon. Mr. Patterson, Member for Brantford, Ont. George McCurdy was in New Glasgow and started this morning on his way home, but his father sent him a telegram to meet him on the train and return with him, so we looked out for him where the trains crossed. I thought it very likely, also, that Miss Safford might be on that same train, and that I could wave my hand at her as we crossed. We examined every carriage as we passed by, but could see nothing of either of them. I presumed that Miss Safford had been out of town when your letter arrived and therefore telegraphed to Mr. Howes to ask Miss Safford to remain in Washington if she was still in town. Some time after passing the down train George McCurdy suddenly appeared in the car carrying a typewriter — I mean the instrument, not the girl — and then Miss Safford appeared. We left Mr. McCurdy and George at New Glasgow, and came on to Toronto together, and we are now at work in the Learmont Hotel on this letter to you. I have to wait several hours for the St. John's train. Mrs. Learment will take charge of Miss Safford tonight, and she will go on to Baddeck in the morning. The house at the Point is open with Maggie and Mary in charge, so she will go directly there, and they will look after her. In a few days I hope to go up with my father and mother, and I have no doubt that Miss Safford will enjoy a quiet rest at Beinn Bhreagh pending my return, when I expect she will have enough to do.

I have been talking over Grosvenor matters with Mr. McCurdy, who, as you know has a level head — and a kind heart for Bert. He thinks that the only possible opposition to Bert would arise from Mr. Hyde, who would probably object to resigning in his favor. Mr.

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McCurdy says "Why should he resign?" Take the ground that Mr. Hyde's services are indispensable to the Magazine, and that of course Bert could not carry it on without his active assistance, over-sight, and good-will. Assume that he will have all these, let Hyde remain as Editor-in-Chief, and place Bert among the "Associate Editors" where he would appear in good company — no longer an employee, — but an associate and equal. The only change, therefore that would need to be made would be this — Bert's name would be removed from the bottom of the list and no longer appear as "Assistant Editor"; and but be placed at the top immediately following Mr. Hyde, so that the list would read: — JOHN HYDE, EDITOR IN CHIEF, STATISTICIAN IN THE AGRICULTURAL DEPARTMENT, WASHINGTON, D. C.

GILBERT H. GROSVENOR, ASSOCIATE EDITOR IN CHARGE OF THE MAGAZINE., WASHINGTON, D. C.

Then below headed by the words "Associate Editors" would appear the list of names at present on the cover of the Magazine. I think there could be no possible objection to this so long as Hyde is not asked to step down. I would say to him stay at the head, we can't do without you at present. When the time comes that you want to resign, it may be possible that you will have trained up Mr. Grosvenor to fill your place, and in the meantime we cannot do without you; and perhaps, after all, considering that Mr. Grosvenor should become my son-in-law, it may be advisable in the future that he should seek some other sphere of usefulness with better prospects of promotion. So that, taking it all in all, it would be inadvisable for Mr. Hyde to resign until the future is more clearly defined before us.

Under this arrangement Bert would be associated with Mr. Hyde in the editorship as the active man in immediate charge of the Magazine, and not appear as an employee under Mr. Hyde. Mr. Hyde would appear in an honorary capacity as Editor-in-chief who would naturally be condoned by his colleagues. Mr. Hyde's duties at the Agricultural Department would prevent him from appearing very often at the office, and little by little, as time went on — Bert's position being secured by an agreement for a year instead of a

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month — the full management of the journal would gradually be transferred to Bert without fail. I think this is the best solution of the problem at the present time. Let the future look after itself.

Now, I would like to say a few words to my little Ellie, but I know you will say — “WRITE THEM YOURSELF and don't send us second-hand, type-written stuff”.

Alright — but I know the result I will try to write, and perhaps you will get half a dozen lines instead of ten pages — perhaps even the half a dozen lines themselves may fail.

Miss Safford may leave the rest of this page for me.

P. S. Hold on, Miss Safford has not done yet. The Captain on the Ulunda turned out to be very fond of talking and had quite a fund of little anecdotes that he told very well. I noted a few in my waist coat pocket book, and now give them for your benefit.

### FOG STORY

A London broker was very anxious to get home in time for the opening of the stock exchange. He had a grand speculation to make — millions in it — if he could only be there on time. Upon entering the Thames, however, a fog bank rendered progress inadvisable, and the ship came to anchor. It was night, and our friend the broker was about retiring to his berth when he felt the ship stop, and the anchor chains rattling in the bow. Rushing up on deck he wildly addressed the Captain —

“What's the matter?” “Why have we stopped? Is anything wrong?”

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“Fog, Sir — fog”. Said the Captain.

“Fog?” retorted the irate passenger, pointing upwards to the sky. “Why I can see the stars overhead”.

“Oh, but we are not going that way”, said the Captain with a laugh — “Unless the biler busts”.

### **THE FRENCHMAN'S GLASS OF CONTRADICTION.**

A Frenchman appeared at an American bar, and wanted a drink.

“I vant a glass of — vot do you call it — a glass of — of — a glass of contradiction”

“A glass of contradiction, why what in all the world do you mean by that?”

“Vy you know you pour in a leetle whiskey, to make him strong and den you pour in water to make him weak; after — if you please — a little lemon to make him sour, and some sugar to make him sweet. Den you say ‘Here's to you,’ and you drink him yourself”.

### **HURRICANE**

The passengers vied with one another in describing the force of a the wind in a hurricane, but the mate carried off the cake, when he said that he had been in a storm once where the wind blew so hard strong that it required two men to hold on the Captain's hair.

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Fruit in the orchard at last. McInnis reports one tree as actually uproot ing ed by its own weight of apples. It has been replaced in position with guy ropes to sustain it. Apples pears and plumbs in profusion, and of course all the small fruits as well..

### **HAS A SHEEP UPPER FRONT TEETH?**

This is a question that is exciting Baddeck just now, and seems to me to be a good illustration of the futility of o O pinion when opposed to Fact. Bets have been laid on both sides of the question, and one would think that the simplest way of settling it would be to catch a sheep. But, no, discussions by the hour have ensured, and it has been attempted

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to decide a question of fact by a vote ! A farmer The decision was in favor of the upper front teeth, and a far e m er who had had a large flock of sheep and for many years put his foot down with a vim. He said it was ridiculous to discuss the question. He had been bitten by a sheep AND HE KNEW. But still others expressed doubts. The McCurdy boys remember s e d that there was a sheep's skull near their cabin, and they went to fetch it while Kennan, McCurdy & Co. continued the discussion. The sheep's skull had no front teeth to its upper jaw, but the end of the jaw was decayed, and the question remained unsettled. Some of the guests continued the discussion at the Telegraph House, and bets were 13 freely made. The telephone was resorted to, and Crowdis, the butcher was asked to decide the question. He put half a dozen sheep on board of a wagon and drove them down to the Telegraph House for the inspection of the visitors. A thorough examination was made, and all were convinced and the bets were settled, and the result showed — that the actual observation of a fact was worth more than all the opinions that could be offered. Of course I need not tell you the answer, you have had so many sheep on Beinn Bhreagh that of course you know.

Your loving husband Alec. Love to Daidums and Elsie AGB I enclose letters from Prof. Mrs. Alexander Graham Bell 9 Rue Boccador, Paris, France.